



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
FRONT RANGE CENTER
3170 EAST MAIN STREET
CANON CITY, COLORADO 81212



FRONT RANGE RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING
HOLY CROSS ABBEY
March 18, 2004

MINUTES

ATTENDEES:

GROUP 1

Rick Thompson
Gene King
Robert Shoemaker
Chuck Rech

GROUP 2

Frances Mathews
Josh Osterhoudt
Leslie Wildesen
Kaaren Hardy

GROUP 3

Keith McNew
Michael Bush
Loren Whittemore
Joseph Duda

RAC members not in attendance: Virginia Patton, Larry Strohl and Clarke Becker.

GUESTS: SeEtta Moss, president of the Arkansas Valley Audubon Society, Camille Mills, Senator Wayne Allards Office, Mike Walker, Arkansas Headwaters. Recreation Area

BLM/USFS PERSONNEL:

Roy Masinton, Ken Smith, Pete Zwaneveld, Katie Franke, Mark Swinney, Jan Fackrell, and Dave Walker.

There was adequate attendance for a quorum.

Chairman Loren Whittemore called the meeting to order at 9:15 a.m.

COUNCIL BUSINESS:

Roy Masinton updated the Council on the status of their comments on the Sage Grouse Initiative that were sent to the State Director last fall. The comments were forwarded to the BLM, Washington Office and they expect to come out with a Draft Conservation Strategy in late June.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

SeEtta Moss met with BLM staff in the San Luis Valley. Everyone was very accommodating and she found the roads were great for travel. SeEtta then shared some photos of the Rock Creek Canyon area. She was impressed with the public land in the San Luis Valley.

MANAGER UPDATE:

Mark Swinney: Jim Rhett is going to be Acting Forest Supervisor for the Rio Grande National Forest and Swinney will be acting for Jim for the BLM in the San Luis Valley. Peter Clark, the

Forest Supervisor will be detailed, for about six months, to New Mexico in order to help with communication on grazing issues, in that area.

Roy Masinton: We are still working on the transition plan for authority from the Front Range Center to go to the San Luis Valley and will probably have a signature for the delegation of authority within the month.

The Front Range RAC has 5 members whose terms will end in August: Bob Shoemaker – Grazing; Frances Mathews – Environmental; Larry Strohl - Dispersed Recreation; Michael Bush - Public at Large and Clarke Becker - Public at Large. The nomination period closes on April 19th this year. Anyone wanting to apply or reapply will need to submit a Nomination Form with letters of recommendation. Once the Nomination Period closes, BLM will confer with the Governor's office and send the nomination forms to the BLM Washington office. The appointments will be made by the Secretary of the Interior in August.

Masinton briefed the Council on several issues that he also briefed the local federal congressional staffs on two weeks ago.

Park County Oil and Gas Lease Sale: The current BLM oil and gas leasing program attempts to provide public lands/mineral estate for lease and exploration where industry indicates an interest in such activities. Approximately 20 parcels totaling approximately 30,000 acres of surface and/or mineral estate were nominated for leasing in Park County. Only two requests for drilling are expected. In the same area, about 13,000 acres are already under lease. Park County and the lands in question were included in the BLM Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (RMP-EIS) agreement in 1996. However, some land owners do not understand that BLM has the mineral rights under some private lands. The surface owner's surface rights as well as all subsurface water and mineralized zones are protected by BLM requirements and normal oil field operating procedure. Well sites, roads and other facilities are moved to prevent both resource damage and damage to surface owner improvements. A bond exists for insuring the operator complies with the conditions of approval and does not damage surface owner rights. All unused or abandoned surface disturbances are reshaped and reseeded with the bond being held until reclamation is successful.

The Sipal Exchange: The BLM is involved in the process of exchanging about 4,000 acres in South Park. The proponents Mr. and Mrs. Sipal, agreed to cover the cultural resources costs in the Agreement to Initiate a land exchange. BLM received the inventory report from the archaeological contractor in December, 2003. A total of 54 sites and 47 isolated finds were recorded. BLM is still in the process of determining National Register eligibility of the sites. One of the sites is a historic schoolhouse which might have significant underground deposits. The site needs minimal testing to determine the nature of the deposits. The work cannot be done until the ground has thawed, because digging into frozen ground could cause severe damage to the deposits. Mr. and Mrs. Sipal are concerned about the time this will take as well as the cost.

BLM is in the process of consultation with 15 Indian tribes, as required by the National Historic Preservation Act. When determining eligibility, we will take into account the comments of the tribes and interested parties. Only after we have made these determinations, in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office, will we know what additional work will be necessary.

Afeman Cabin: Mr. Afeman's cabin is located about 12 miles east of Salida. His cabin is about 80 to 90% on public land. There is also a spring on public lands that has been fenced and piped to the cabin. The grazing permittee is unable to use the spring. It was agreed BLM would give him a nonrenewable and nontransferable lifetime lease on the cabin only and the spring development would be converted to stock and wildlife water. He would also pay back rent for 22 years and pay rent for the remainder of his lifetime lease.

Sand Gulch Subdivision Road: Chaffee County is requiring a 60 foot wide right-of-way on the existing access road across BLM managed public land. BLM regulations at 43 CFR 2800 place several restrictions on our issuance of rights-of-ways. Among other things, the regulations require BLM to protect the natural resources and allow no unnecessary and undue degradation of the public land. BLM, by regulation and policy, issues rights-of-way only for the area needed to construct and maintain the facility. BLM is proposing to increase the existing 30 foot right-of-way to 40 foot and wider in places to accommodate water drainage structures.

BLM must be able to justify any additional increased width in an environmental document which is subject to public review, however we are not aware of adequate justification to increase the width of this right-of-way to the requested 60 feet. BLM believes a 40 foot ROW is appropriate to handle the subdivision needs including drainage. The County Commissioners have agreed to let the County Planner work with BLM to accommodate drainage and any other needs at specific locations outside the 40 foot ROW.

Stanley Creek Exchange: Jan Fackrell, acting Renewable Resource Supervisor, briefed the Council. BLM will acquire 4,860 acres of the Stanley Creek property and 50% of the mineral rights on 3,595 acres. Of this land, 320 acres is within and would become a part of the San Isabel National Forest. BLM would patent 11,873 acres along with mineral rights on 1840 acres to Wolf Springs Ranch. Simultaneously, Wolf Springs Ranch will donate two conservation easements to the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. The first would be a 780 acre part of the Stanley Creek parcel dropped from the exchange to equalize values. The second would be on the west side of the Wolf Springs Ranch adjoining the Sangre de Christo Wilderness. This easement would include about 1,500 acres of public lands conveyed to the Ranch in the exchange, along with a 160 acre parcel of private lands held by the ranch. BLM anticipates closing on the exchange in late April.

Travel Management Planning in the Royal Gorge Field Office: Masinton briefed the Council. The public comment period for the Gold Belt Plan Environmental Assessment (EA) ended in February. The office is currently reviewing the comments and it is anticipated the Record of Decision and Finding of No Significant Impact will be distributed for public review and a 30 day protest period in April. If there are no protests, the plan could be implemented this summer. BLM does anticipate one protest from an individual who wants to maintain access from his property to travel on public land. We are trying to limit the number of roads from private property onto public land.

The next plan is the Arkansas River Travel Management Plan and BLM is currently doing road and trail inventory work in this planning area. Public scoping for this plan could begin in April or May.

Fuels treatments projects: There are multiple fuels projects on the public land managed by the Royal Gorge Field Office. Some are completed, however the majority are being planned at this time and include both prescribed fire and mechanical treatments. Mechanical treatments are favored in areas near subdivisions. Mechanical treatments are often done on the perimeter of areas where a prescribed burn is planned to help control the fire. There was some discussion about the need to continue the fuels treatment program with additional money and impact other programs as little as possible. Swinney commented in the SLV they are trying to educate people about the difference between fuel reduction projects and fire breaks and are listening to what the community wants.

Boulder County land exchange: Jan Fackrell briefed the council. BLM's 1986 Northeast Resource Management Plan (RMP) determined that the remaining BLM managed public lands in Boulder County should be disposed of because they cannot be effectively managed. These lands consist of numerous small, fragmented, isolated parcels that are difficult and uneconomic for the federal government to manage and receive very limited use by the general public.

In 2003, the Ward Land Exchange was completed. Boulder County acquired 705 acres of federal land for inclusion in their Parks and Open Space program. It intends to retain the majority of the newly acquired parcels as publicly owned open space. As part of the exchange, the U. S. Forest Service acquired the 165-acre Caribou Flats parcel, which lies approximately 16 miles west of the city of Boulder and within the Roosevelt National Forest. The BLM acquired a 484-acre parcel in Teller County that lies approximately one mile southwest of Cripple Creek.

The majority of the remaining 2,000 acres of BLM lands are in the Gold Hill Planning Unit. BLM anticipates receiving a Recreation & Public Purposes (R&PP) application from the County for the Butzel Hill and Bighorn Mountain areas. An exchange proposal from Boulder County for a large portion of the Gold Hill Unit is also anticipated. To this point, Boulder County has provided funding of approximately \$300,000 for the survey of lands to be included in the upcoming exchange, and will provide additional funding to continue the survey effort.

Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area Integrated Concept Plan (ICP): Mike Walker, Agreement Administrator for the Colorado State Parks, Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area (AHRA) briefed the Council. The Arkansas River Management Plan was signed in 1989 and revised in 2001. In the Plan, Commercial boaters are rationed with each area having a boat per day limit. In 1991 commercial boaters exceeded the limit 5 times in one season thus starting the rationing process and two years ago private boaters exceeded their number of boaters.

The Integrated Concept Plan (ICP) grew from a desire of both Private Boaters and Commercial Boating Outfitters to try and resolve a number of long standing problems. These problems concerned both private and commercial boater issues within the AHRA. The ICP contains ten points: Reduction of commercial boat per day carrying capacities; Increase in commercial boat per day carrying capacities; Adjustment of commercial launch window; Reduction in private boat per day carrying capacities; Increase in private boat per day carrying capacities; Private boat permit system; Minimum fees; Minimum per client fee; Agreement transfer incentive; Minimum operating requirement. These issues have been brought to the attention of Colorado State Parks and the Bureau of Land Management as partners in the management of the AHRA.

Over 150 comments have been received on the overall plan and about 500 on individual items. The EA is expected to go out for public comment next week. Last year 214,000 clients boated on the River. The average fee is \$44.00 a head which generates about \$450,000 in fees for State Parks. The money stays here and is used in the AHRA only.

Lunch

South Park Land Plan Amendment: BLM is doing an evaluation of the 72,000 acres of BLM administered public lands in Park County to determine those lands to retain and those to be disposed. The current decision in the Land Use Plan, completed in 1996, is to dispose of all BLM public lands in South Park. Factors to be applied in making the new decisions include: the status of the mountain plover as a BLM Sensitive Species; recognition by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service of the importance of fens (wetlands of concern); the Park County Strategic Master Plan and the accessibility of BLM managed public lands. Consolidation of public lands to accommodate these issues has become a more desirable option. BLM has begun work on this plan with a public scoping meeting on February 25 and a comment period that ends March 19. BLM is working with other agencies such as the Division of Wildlife and the Park County Commissioners and have briefed them on the proposed Amendment.

SLV Travel Management Planning: Mark Swinney said they are waiting for the Notice of Intent to be published. They are anticipating doing the public scoping in 60 to 90 days. The planning area will encompass the San Luis Valley floor or about 520,000 acres. It is expected to be done in two years. Gene King asked what was needed from the RAC personnel who are team members. Swinney said the RAC will be needed to help with the scoping, analyze the information, and help develop the objectives for the overall plan.

San Luis Valley Status Report: Mark then presented a status report on BLM in the San Luis Valley and an overall discussion on workload and plans. Items included in the update are: term grazing permits, grazing decisions, riparian, range, wildlife, recreation, and soil health and wildlife monitoring. Also the Baxter Lumber Mill exchange, noxious weed treatment and monitoring, land adjustments and the Penitente and Zapata Falls recreation areas. Sage Grouse issues in the Valley are still confined to a small area that has been studied since 1998. BLM is working with Natural Resource Conservation Service on weed treatments and monitoring, and we hope for a valley wide effort in the future.

Gene King offered to help the OHV users apply for grant money to accomplish the travel management goals.

Weed Management Resolution: The Council followed up on the discussion from the January 14 meeting on weed management and drafted a Resolution encouraging statewide coordination on the eradication/control of Noxious Weeds. The Resolution will be typed and sent to all Council members for final comment.

Whittemore adjourned the meeting.

Next meeting is in the San Luis Valley on May 18th and 19th with a field trip planned on the 19th.

Roy L. Masinton
Front Range Center Manager
Bureau of Land Management

Loren R. Whittemore
Chairman
Front Range Resource Advisory Council